THE DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

of

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

presents the opening concert in its new series

EXPLORATIONS

Sunday, October 15, 1972, at 8:30 p.m.

Convocation Hall, Arts Building

QUARTET IN E FLAT MAJOR, K. 493 ..... W. A. Mozart

Allegro
Larghetto
Allegretto

Lawrence Fisher, violin
Michael Bowie, viola
Claude Kenneson, violoncello
Helmut Brauss, piano

SONGS AND DANCES OF DEATH ..... Modeste Mussorgsky

Lullaby
Serenade
Trepak (Russian Dance)
Commander-in-Chief

Bernard Turgeon, baritone
Ernesto Lejano, piano

INTERMISSION

DUO, OP. 7 (1914) ..... Zoltan Kodaly

Allegro serioso, non troppo
Adagio
Maestoso; Presto

Thomas Rolston, violin
Claude Kenneson, violoncello

QUARTET NO. 1 (1896) ..... Charles Ives

Andante con moto
Allegro
Andante cantabile
Allegro marziale

The University of Alberta String Quartet
Thomas Rolston and Lawrence Fisher, violins
Michael Bowie, viola; Claude Kenneson, violoncello

Next concert in this series: Sunday, November 26, at 8:30 p.m. — Vocal and Brass Music of the Renaissance; Choros No. 4 for brass by Villa-Lobos; Violet Archer's Cantata Sacra for five voices and nine instruments.

COMING EVENTS:

Monday, October 30, at 8:30 p.m. in Convocation Hall — The Symphonic Wind Ensemble of the Department of Music conducted by John Iltis, Associate Professor of Music, with guest soloist Eugene Rousseau, alto saxophonist. No admission charge.

PROGRAM NOTES

Mozart completed his Second Piano Quartet (K. 493) in 1786, a year in which he suffered numerous personal misfortunes but also achieved extraordinary artistic productivity. The second quartet followed another (K 478) that had proved unpopular, apparently because of its performance difficulties for the amateur musical public. In return for Mozart's promise that no further works in the same genre would be forthcoming, the publisher of the First Piano Quartet had allowed Mozart to keep the entire advance payment on a projected series of similar quartets. Nevertheless, Mozart did write a second piano quartet and gave it to another publisher.

At this time, Mozart was at the height of his creative powers. Furthermore, his imagination seems to have been especially stimulated by the potential of the concerted medium of piano with orchestra or chamber ensemble — the distinction between the latter two being less pronounced then than it is now. The Second Piano Quartet is akin to the classical concerto not only in format — three movements — but also in its generally light spirit. Every movement offers an abundance of melodic riches, all the more remarkable for the easy way in which Mozart welds them into a unified whole. Although almost any of the numerous themes of the first movement could bear extensive repetition, Mozart favors one particularly graceful ornamented melodic idea that invests the movement with a pervasive lyricism. This quality carries over into the slow movement, as well as into the genial closing movement, where the piano enjoys special prominence. However, the quartet partakes of the possibilities not only of solo concerto dialogue, but also of the synthesis of chamber ensemble elements. As a whole, the work carries almost no hint of purposeful struggle or contrived intricacy. It seems rather to be motivated by the special joy of music-making for its own sake, and as such is an appropriate opening for the "Explorations" series. Mozart wrote it for pleasure; likewise, we play it and listen to it.

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In an autobiographical notice, Mussorgsky once wrote of himself: "Art is a means toward communication with human beings, not an end in itself. This principle determines his entire creative activity. Since he proceeds from the conviction that human speech is governed by strictly musical laws . . ., he sees the duty of music to be the tonal reflection not only of accesses of feeling but also of the pulsations of human speech." Mussorgsky also believed that an artist should express the communal ethos of his nation, and was active in a group of fervently Russian composers trying to combat the German domination of Russian musical life.

In the SONGS AND DANCES OF DEATH (1877), melody and other elements of musical structure are taken not as ends in themselves, but rather as means to heighten the power of dramatic expression. Each song is a miniature drama showing a different aspect of Death, in characterizations true to the spirit of Russian folk literature, even though the text was written by a friend of Mussorgsky. The inherently flexible qualities of Russian folk melody have been masterfully turned to narrative purposes in dramatic monologues and dialogues of awful vividness and realism. Death is, successively, the deliverer of a child from the pain of illness; a knight to free an invalid girl so that she can satisfy the youthful desires only frustrated in life; a dancing crony for a drunken peasant lost and freezing on his way home through the forest; and the ultimate victor in every war — Death in its most terrifying aspect.

The SONGS AND DANCES OF DEATH pose a telling contrast to the Mozart quartet on this program. In the quartet, abstract musical beauty is its own raison d'être, without evident national colorings. In Mussorgsky's songs, music is the vehicle for a powerfully concrete kind of literal expression, thoroughly imbued with a sense of cultural time and place so strong that we of another milieu can still be moved.

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Written in 1914, Kodaly's Duo for Violin and Violoncello, Op. 7, dates from a period when he was collaborating with Bartok in research into the folk music of Hungarian and other cultures. While Bartok found it morally impossible to remain in Hungary during the years of Fascist ascendancy, Kodaly continued to live there throughout his life, making significant contributions not only through his compositions but also through formulation of highly successful methods of musically educating the young. Generally, Kodaly also tended to remain in more familiar musical territory than did Bartok.

In the Duo, Kodaly has chosen a medium eminently suited to the expression of indigenous Hungarian musical idioms as well as to his own penchant for ardent lyricism and frequent contrasts of mood. He calls upon the full resources of the two instruments (and their players), including multiple stops, percussive articulations, and extremes of range that evoke the sound of Slavic folk instruments and singers. His sympathetic understanding of native idioms can be heard also in modal, highly ornamented, or long-breathed melodies; in driving, flexible, or asymmetrical rhythms; and in repetitive figures or drones reminiscent of folk ensemble music. Although a nationalist composer like Mussorgsky or Ives, Kodaly evinces in his music a thorough professionalism and regard for the central tradition of Western European art music — concerns rather foreign to the other two nationalists heard tonight.

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Ever since Charles Ives was "discovered" in the 1930's, his reputation as a true musical American and pioneer has grown. He composed his First String Quartet in 1896 at the age of twenty-two; but, like so much of his music, it was not published until much later (in this case, 1963). In the work, Ives already asserts a rugged musical individuality that seems to be flying in the face of the derivative neo-romanticism permeating "establishment" musical culture in America at that time — not the least representative of which was Ives' own teacher, Horatio Parker. The quartet is subtitled both "From the Salvation Army" and "A Revival Service." Ives' quotation of revival hymns in the piece is neither parody nor sentimental nostalgia, much more than a joke and certainly not mockery or ridicule. Ives was one of those men who could realize the potential of popular material while still preserving its honest, simple character. From beginning to end, the quartet voices an immense vitality and good cheer born of the faith held by the purveyors of the original musical material that inspired Ives. A clear melodic counterpoint permits quick recognition of tune quotations: "From Greenland's Icy Mountains" and "All Hail the Power" in the fugal first movement; "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing" in the third; and "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus" in the fourth. The counterpoint might be regarded as academic; this is a student work, after all. But Ives' audacities (for that time) enliven the music in a way that, true to his New England heritage, is responsible in its intuitive logic and effectiveness. Each part, regardless of considerations of pleasant combination, seems to maintain the same stubborn independence that Ives himself did. Musically and philosophically, he believed in a unity that transcended conventional dichotomies of sublime and banal, regular and irregular, stable and unstable.

— W. K.